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AUTHOR Lazarus, Philip J.: Lavendera, Lourdes
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ABSTRACT

The paper proposes a transcultural model that emphasizes the importance of handicapped Indian children acquiring skills and knowledge of their majority culture without sacrificing their cultural identity. The values and history of the Miccosukee tribe from Florida are discussed, as are the philosophy and organization of a Bureau of Indian Affairs school for Miccosukees. The guidance and counseling program in the school is described in terms of its approach to dropout prevention, vocational guidance, and interpersonal skills. The interpersonal skills of special educators are seen as more important than program content. (CL)

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The Implementation of Exceptional Child Education Programs for Native American Youngsters

BY

Philip J. Lazarus, Ph.D.
Director of the School Psychology Training Program
Florida International University
Tamiami Trail
Miami, Florida 33199

Lourdes Lavendera
Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Miccousukee Indian Tribe
Tamiami Trail
Miami, Florida

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INTRODUCTION

A report issued by the U.S. Bureau of Census indicates that 827,000 people identify themselves as being American Indians. Special educators and psychologists are now becoming increasingly aware of the cultural and sociological factors relating to psycho-educational development of minority youngsters. However, it is important to note that research has typically centered on only two groups of minority children: Hispanics and Blacks. It seems remarkable how little is known about the Native American child, especially since it is estimated by the U.S. Office of Education that there are approximately 326,000 Native American school age children. Therefore, if little is known about the Native American youngster, less is known about the characteristics of those children requiring Exceptional Child Education services.

The purpose of this article is to address effective strategies for developing exceptional child education and school psychological services for Native American youngsters. The major emphasis will be upon preserving the cultural heritage of each student and incorporating a transcultural approach. The basic assumption is that it is possible for minority culture children to acquire the skills, knowledge and material possessions of the majority culture without sacrificing their identity-supporting customs. This paper will focus on tribal Indian values and specifically Miccousukee

values as they relate to education and special education. It is necessary to understand the shared values of the tribe in developing exceptional child education services. Therefore, values and customs of the Miccosukee tribe will be addressed with emphasis on facilitating community involvement and support of specialized services. Finally, special considerations in counseling and special education will be presented with a discussion of implications.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

A new era of Federal recognition of Indian culture and language began with the passage by Congress of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508) and the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27). These acts gave Indians the right to local control over the education being offered to them. According to Evans, Abbey, and Reed (1977) to a limited extent there has been progress toward this goal during the years since the passage of these acts.

It is viewed that this legislation is the most important step taken by the United States government toward self-determination for Indians. When physical annihilation of Indians appeared to be unworkable and unnecessary, assimilation became the goal. Assimilation has been referred to as cultural annihilation (Evans, Abbey and Reed, 1977). There were many reasons for the failure of assimilation, the most important was the existence of reservations and separate societies on them. It is hoped that by the passage of these laws that the dominant culture finally recognizes the right of other cultures to exist side by side.

It now seems that the U.S. government supports the idea of self-determination. This means, among other things, the right to maintain one's own language. The teaching of both the English language and the tribal language is a means

towards that end. It must be recognized that government programs aimed at North American Indians did not have the desired effect of acculturation. After more than two hundred years of effort by the United States government, many North American Indians still speak only their native language. This is an obvious, yet sometimes overlooked consideration in developing special education programs for these youngsters.

TRANSCULTURAL MODEL

In the past, contacts between the majority Anglo culture and Native Americans, placed emphasis on the need for the latter to "acculturate" as a means of achieving material rewards and psychosocial adjustment. Now recent programs suggest that a more equitable arrangement is biculturalism, which strikes a balance between the anglo and tribal cultures. However, the result has often been projects that train for bilingualism on the assumption that this is equivalent to biculturalism.

A third alternative has been suggested by Dinges, Yazzie and Tollefson (1974) that is termed the transcultural model. It views cultural contact as an opportunity for enhancing the personal development of Native Americans rather than an occasion for a clash between the Indian and Anglo life style in which one culture must replace the other. It predicts that there will be greater self actualization since the Native American child will be able to function effectively in two cultures. The basic assumption of this model is that it is possible for the minority culture to acquire the skills and knowledge of the majority culture without sacrificing self

identity and self respect. This models hopes that the acquistion of functional behaviors in the majority culture will not result in the loss of tribal values. A philosophical adherence to this model has been incorporated in the development and implementation of exceptional child education programs at the Miccosukee school.

THE MICCOSUKEE TRIBE

The Miccosukee are a small group, numbering about 450 in all, roughly 250 are registered members of the tribe and another 200 are living in scattered clusters along the Tamiami Trail which runs through the Everglades. This band of Indians belongs to the Hitchite-speaking branch of the Muskogean linguistic family. The present Miccosukees are descendents of those Indians who fled into the Florida swamps rather than submit to forced removal to Indian Territory. This "solution" was conceived as a way of gaining possession by covetous white settlers of the rich land in the Southeast occupied by Indians.

The Miccosukees are described as being "fiercely individual and independent." (Von Malitz, 1975). They also harbor deep feelings about the white man, stemming from their ancestors harrowing experiences of being hunted down in swamplands like animals (along with runaway slaves). Soldiers were sent out to round up the Indians for the long march into the country which was set aside for them in the land west of the Mississippi. However, the soldiers finally had to give up and admit defeat. In their youth, the elders of the community were warned when

they became obstreperous that if they were too noisy, "The soldier will hear you and come get you." This threat of the soldier bogeyman was used as a disciplinary technique and was enough to quiet the noisiest child. (Von Malitz, 1975).

THE MICCOSUKEE SCHOOL

In 1962 a BIA school was established for the Miccosukees. Before that, children of these Indians had to travel by bus to Miami Dade County schools. But most Miccosukees were not inclined to send their children to be educated in the distrusted white man's way, and many did not attend school at all.

The Miccosukee tribe contracted with the BIA to run the schools themselves, and it is now under the overall direction of the tribal council. The Miccosukees have also contracted to direct their own health and welfare programs. They are the first Indian tribe to take over management of all these services from the BIA, under such a contract agreement.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

The philosophy of the school emphasizes the following values:

1. The Miccosukee cultural heritage of each student should be preserved while assisting the student to acquire the skills necessary to function in the non-Indian society.
2. The Miccosukee school should be a bilingual-bicultural school for learning the two models, the Miccosukee and the non-Indian, and thus sustaining respect for both cultures.

3. The Miccosukee School should provide for individual needs, aptitudes, abilities and personal goals.

4. The Miccosukee School should help students to develop a strong self image, based on confidence in the positive relationship of the student's Indian self to the non-Indian world.

TRIBAL VALUES

Several researchers (Foerster and Little Soldier; Zintz, 1962) have focused on core values that seem to unite Native Americans. These values include: (1) children are accorded the same degree of respect as an adult; (2) there is importance placed on the values of cooperation and harmony with the environment; (3) an individual is judged by his relative contribution to the group; (4) competition is encouraged, but in an intra-individual sense; (5) there is a desire to live a relatively unhurried and present-time oriented lifestyle; (6) children are not generally accustomed to the structure imposed by adults especially as found in the school setting, and; (7) there is a value placed on the traditional lifestyle with a concomitant desire to remain anonymous.

Furthermore, there are additional values that are reflected in Miccosukee culture. These include: (1) wisdom gained from experience and awareness; (2) independence of tribal goals; i.e., identification is greater with the Miccosukee tribe than with Native North Americans in general; (3) learning by the observation of elders; (4) close ties to the homeland and the extended family,

with no desire to be part of the Miami community; (5) peace and politeness are essential and confrontation is considered a violation of cultural norms; (6) moral character as a source of status; (7) food gathering, hunting, and fishing are done by men in providing for the family; and (8) reverence for old age.

IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAM

In implementing the guidance and counseling program into the Miccosukee School, the program needed to be consistent with the school philosophy and tribal values of the community. The administration was primarily concerned with the prevention of dropouts and vocational counseling. The administrators hired the second author as the Director of Counseling and Guidance Services in January, 1979.

Dropout Prevention:

It was determined that students were dropping out of school due to the supply of ample well paying jobs within the reservation. Students preferred to make seven to eight dollars an hour on construction work rather than sit in a classroom. The guidance director met with the Indian Action Team Director and convinced him that students should be allowed to attend school one or two hours per day with pay. All the students who were performing well at their job and arrived on time were allowed this privilege. Also, flexible scheduling was established with the school day extended to nine p.m. to meet the student's needs.

Adaptation of curriculum materials and methods were also initiated. For example, the math program was tailored to the construction industry. Concepts were taught that dealt directly with the specific needs of these young adults.

Vocational Guidance:

The vocational guidance program provides the students with an opportunity to learn about themselves which includes their own abilities and interests. Also, students are given information concerning vocational and career opportunities. Programs are currently being initiated in the area of graphic arts, auto mechanics and air conditioning repair. In addition to the specific skills in these areas, the facilitation of decision making skills and the development of personal responsibility is stressed.

The ability of a non-Indian counselor to enter the Miccosukee system is dependent on adaptability. Therefore, the counselor needs to first consider the stated needs of the community and adopt those needs as the highest priority.

Interpersonal Skills:

The Miccosukee culture is a democratic type of system, with everyone having a say. Only as a last resort will a Miccosukee administrator fall back on rank as a final solution to a problem. The counselor needs to recognize that there is no precise pecking order within the tribe.

Indians communicate through gossip and "chit chat." Gossip is often the means of social control in a society that considers direct confrontation extremely rude. Non-Indian staff are encour-

aged to make small talk with coworkers. Therefore, the counselor or the special education teacher needs to be sensitive to this gossip and perceive it as a form of social contact.

Indians do not feel the need to fill pauses in conversations with idle words. They will often remain silent and consider their ideas before speaking. The non-Indian will have a shorter response time and tends to interrupt Indians before they have expressed their ideas. This is again considered rude behavior and the non-Indian needs to wait in silence. The exceptional child educator should let an Indian signal when the topic is changed or the meeting is over.

Indians are event-oriented. Students will feel frustrated if the educator has not allowed enough time to finish an assigned task. However, Indian children also need to learn that non-Indians are preoccupied with time. Therefore, it is important for the Indian youngster to understand this, especially if he enters the world of work in the majority culture.

Disapproval in the Miccosukee culture is often signaled by silence. Miccosukees also use silence to indicate reluctance to share information. Therefore, when a Miccosukee youngster says "I don't know" he may mean I don't want to tell you, I am prohibited from telling you, or simply I don't know. Miccosukees also do not speak for others. Often, only after the group has been consulted can an opinion be expressed.

Models of Treatment:

Since the Miccosukee society is traditional and secretive, the counselor will not meet with success using verbal interaction.

Therefore, the preferred models of treatment incorporate play and art as a form of symbolic expression. Also, the DUSO materials when adapted have been used successfully with primary grade children.

The effective utilization of the community resources such as the medicine man and tribal health educators are important in providing service. The tribal health educators teach the youngster the value of the plants' dietary rules and the cultural legends. The medicine man is considered the most powerful healer in the community. Therefore, the counselor can advise parents to take their child to the medicine man, only as a last resort in extreme situations.

IMPLEMENTING EXCEPTIONAL CHILD EDUCATION

The Miccosukee community opposes selecting an individual for special attention as this is in contrast to their value system. The counseling program was initiated by the tribe, whereas the exceptional child education program was resisted by community members. The tribe was informed by the BIA that ECE programs must be initiated under the mandate of PL 94-142 or the school would lose their funding. Teachers referred students for psycho-educational evaluations and enough children met federal ECE criteria for a full time ECE teacher to be hired.

The effectiveness of implementing the program was dependent on the interpersonal skills of the special education teacher and the counselor. The major emphasis was that the

children were going to receive special individualized tutoring to better their academic skills. The parents become receptive since a non-threatening attitude was adopted by the staff.

SUMMARY

By adopting a transcultural model that emphasizes that it is possible for Indian children to acquire the skill and knowledge of the majority culture without sacrificing their cultural identity, special services can be implemented. It is necessary for the exceptional child educator to be sensitive to the cultural heritage, learning style, attitudes and values of the tribal community.

It is the interpersonal skills of the exceptional child educators rather than the program itself that is the most important ingredient.

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